



Department
of Energy &
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29 April 2013

Dear [redacted]

RE: FOI request reference: 13/0440

Thank you for your email of 3 April 2013 where you requested the following information:

1. On what dates since the 2010 general election has the Department for Energy and Climate Change consulted/questioned a focus group?
2. What were the questions it asked?
3. What were the answers those focus groups provided.

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ('the Act'), you have the right to:

- Know whether we hold the information you require
- Be provided with that information (subject to any exemptions under the Act which may apply).

A copy of the information which DECC holds and which can be disclosed is enclosed.

The remainder of the information you requested which is held by the Department is exempt from disclosure at this time under Section 22 of the Freedom of Information Act. This is because the information is intended for publication at a future date. Focus groups are a valuable research tool which enrich policy development and lead to greater transparency in government and there is a public interest in knowing when a focus group is being consulted. However, the information withheld relates to two current research projects which involve the use of focus groups, where disclosing provisional results of the research before it has been quality assured may be misleading. We consider that the best use of public resources is in ensuring the research report is accurate and comprehensive when it is published rather than releasing elements of it in advance of its planned publication. Having considered the public interest, the Department's decision is therefore to withhold this information and it is therefore withheld.

Appeals procedure

If you are dissatisfied with the handling of your request, you have the right to ask for an internal review. Internal review requests should be submitted within two months of the date of receipt of the response to your original letter and should be addressed to foi@decc.gov.uk.

Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

FOI Request 13/0440: DECC's use of focus groups since the 2010 general election.

The Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) has consulted focus groups within the context of a number of research projects since the May 2010 general election. Details of each project, the questions asked and the answers provided are available in each published research report. Where a report has not been published, we have provided details of the questions asked and the answers provided.

1. **Smart Meters: research into public attitudes.** Carried out by Navigator on behalf of the DECC. Report published May 2012.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/smart-meters-research-into-public-attitudes>
2. **Smart Metering Data Access and Privacy Public Attitudes Research.** Carried out by Navigator on behalf of the DECC. Report published December 2012.
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/43045/7227-sm-data-access-privacy-public-att.pdf
3. **Smart for all - Understanding consumer vulnerability during the experience of smart meter installation.** Carried out by National Energy Action on behalf of the DECC. Report published January 2013.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/smart-for-all-understanding-consumer-vulnerability-during-the-experience-of-smart-meter-installation>
4. **Consumer Needs and Wants for the Green Deal - Researching the consumer response to the Green Deal proposition amongst homeowners and small businesses.** Carried out by Ipsos MORI on behalf of the DECC. Report published February 2011.
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/43018/3505-green-deal-consumer-needs-wants.pdf
5. **Green Deal and the Private Rented Sector - Consumer research amongst tenants and landlords.** Carried out by Quadrangle on behalf of the DECC. Report published February 2011.
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/43019/3506-green-deal-consumer-research-prs.pdf
6. **Empowering households: research on presenting energy consumption benchmarks on energy bills.** Carried out by Ipsos MORI on behalf of the DECC. Report published July 2011.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/empowering-households-research-on-presenting-energy-consumption-benchmarks-on-energy-bills>
7. **Understanding homeowners' willingness to take up more efficient heating.** Carried out by Ipsos MORI and the Energy Saving Trust on behalf of the DECC. Report published March 2013.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-future-of-heating-meeting-the-challenge>
8. **Age Action Alliance - Warm homes for older people.** Carried out by National Energy Action on behalf of the DECC. Report published in March 2012.
<http://www.nea.org.uk/Resources/NEA/Policy%20and%20Research/Documents/AA%20Executive%20Summary-FINAL.pdf>
9. National Energy Action used focus groups as part of the **Green Deal and Affordable Warmth Practical Assistance Programmes in 2011-2012 and 2012-13.** The research was carried out on behalf of the DECC but no report has been published. A summary of the questions asked and headline findings for both annual programmes is below.

Green Deal and Affordable Warmth Practical Assistance Programme 2011-2012

The focus groups for this research were conducted in January 2012 and sought discipline specific local authority responses to the Green Deal (GD) and Energy Company Obligation (ECO) consultation issued by DECC in 2011. Local authorities gave a mixed response to the GD and ECO, with some seeing strategic benefits, some identifying operational challenges and some making practical recommendations for delivery.

Focus groups were conducted for a separate research stream, into potential take up of the GD and ECO amongst different housing tenures, in February 2012. The research found general acceptance of the pay-as-you-save principle behind the GD. However there was less enthusiasm in the private rented sector, where tenants were reluctant to participate in a pay-as-you-save mechanism to improve the energy efficiency of their landlord's property. The public underlined the importance of high standards of work, good communications and local businesses involvement in delivering the GD.

Green Deal and Affordable Warmth Practical Assistance Programme 2012-2013

Focus groups were conducted for this research in March 2013, with older people, families and households with disabilities and long-term health conditions asked questions about these households' experiences of cold homes and rising fuel bills; their perceptions of the GD and the ECO, and which organisations they would trust to advise on and deliver the scheme. The research found that many of these households are struggling to heat their homes; they are concerned about taking on a debt/further financial commitment like a GD in the current financial climate; they are put off by the complexity of the ECO; and they consider local authorities and voluntary organisations to be trusted sources of advice and information.

In addition to the above, the DECC has two current research projects which involve the use of focus groups. Reports of both research projects are intended for publication at a future date and the information is therefore withheld under Section 22 of the Freedom of Information Act (see cover letter). The projects are:

1. **'Smart for all'** follow up research (see point 3 above) to improve the DECC's understanding of the longer term experience of smart meters among low-income and vulnerable customers.
2. **Understanding older consumers' attitudes to investing Winter Fuel Payments in energy saving home improvements.** Carried out by Ipsos MORI on behalf of the DECC. The research was conducted in February 2013, with the report expected to be published in spring 2013.